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ENGLISH FURNITURE OF THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE pieces of furniture recently added to the collection of woodwork are among the most important accessions of the year, not only because of the excellence of the individual examples, but also because collectively they form the Museum's only specimens of the English cabinet makers' art of the eighteenth century, and it is hoped that they will be the nucleus for a collection of that much-needed branch of the industrial arts.

The value of such a collection can hardly be over-estimated, for there is no branch of art which more clearly depicts the manners and customs of the human race, and also none, the study of which will do more toward awakening a sense of the beautiful in every day life, with its accompanying direct effect upon the individual. From a collector's standpoint, furniture occupies a unique position, for it is the only form of collecting the result of which has both the aesthetic and practical value equally divided.

The evolution of style and decoration in furniture is one of the most fascinating and instructive of studies, and America is especially rich in specimens showing the various transition stages. In no other country has a style been so completely worked out as it has here, because the colonies being so far removed from the centers of fashion were not tempted to forsake an older for a newer style before it had been fully perfected, and having once acquired the style, the colonial workmen adapting it to the needs of the people, developing it until it had reached a perfection not attained in Europe. The truth of this statement is particularly well illustrated in the development of the high chest of drawers. In England this article of furniture was abandoned, while yet in a rather crude state, for the French commode, on the order of the modern bureau (Fig. 8), but in America it was developed, and the commode form remained comparatively scarce.

The ideal collection, therefore, for the



FIG. 2. ARM CHAIR  
ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



FIG. 3. SIDE CHAIR  
ENGLISH, STYLE OF CHIPPENDALE

# BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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FIG. 1. SETTEE, OR DOUBLE-CHAIR  
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1725

## AN EXHIBITION OF MODERN GERMAN ART

EARLY in the coming winter there will be held in the Museum an exhibition of modern German Art, arrangements for which have been made with the German Government through the Imperial Consul-General, Mr. Karl Buenz.

The objects to be exhibited, consisting

of paintings and sculptural works in bronze and marble, will be collected by a Committee to be appointed and to act under the general supervision of the Art Director of the German Government, Dr. William Bode. The artists to be represented and the selection of the works of each will be made with the approval of the highest authorities in Germany, thereby assuring a collection representative of the best work of to-day.



FIG. 4. SIDE CHAIR  
STYLE OF CHIPPENDALE, GOTHIC  
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1760-1770



FIG. 5. RIBBON-BACK CHAIR  
ENGLISH STYLE OF CHIPPENDALE

Museum, would be a combination of English and American pieces, the former to show the models from which the colonial workmen acquired their inspiration and the latter to show the independent development of the style far away from the influences of fashion.

The specimens now chosen by the Museum are especially well adapted to these uses, and fall within two well defined groups, one showing the Dutch, and the other showing the French influence.

The dominant feature of the former school is the use of the cyma curve in outline and decoration which is carried to such an extent in some specimens of chairs that all straight lines are eliminated. The splat which characterizes eighteenth century chairs was first solid and plain, then curved, and later pierced in various designs. The decoration was carved in relief upon the surface, and occasionally applied. The designs were swags and pendants of flowers and fruits, shells, usually that of the scallop, acanthus leaves and scrolls, tassels, heads and wings of eagles, crowns, conventional figures and mascarons.

Fig. 1, here shown, is a settee, or double chair, dating about 1725, illustrating many of the characteristics above enumerated. The outline of the backs is composed of cyma curves as are also the arms and their supports, the front rail is curved, and the legs are in the same curve, commonly called cabriole or bandy legs, terminating in bird's-claw and ball-feet.

The decoration is in relief carving, in shells and acanthus scrolls; the splats are pierced with oval openings, which are surrounded by two birds, their beaks meeting at the top with one wing on each side; below are cords and tassels. On the knees are carved shells and flower pendants.

Fig. 2. shows a walnut veneered arm chair of about the same date. On the top rail are carved five medallions, each containing a spray of flowers; the splat is cut away in a form suggestive of the later style and carved in relief with flowers and leaves and edged with an acanthus leaf scroll. The arms and their

supports are also carved in the same leaf design. The legs are cabriole terminating in animal-claw and ball-feet.

The epoch showing French influence may be divided into two periods following the Louis XV and the Louis XVI styles. To the former period belongs the famous Thomas Chippendale of St. Martin's Lane, London, who published his *Gentleman's and Cabinet Makers' Director* in 1754 and two successive editions during the ten years following. His success must have been immediate, because within a few years several other cabinet-makers published designs so similar that it is often impossible to distinguish between them. For this reason, it is but fair to call the furniture of this fashion by Chippendale's name.

The chief characteristic of the Chippendale style up to about 1770 was the use of Rococo scrolls, dripping water effects and conventionalized leaves and flowers, intermingled often with Chinese and Gothic designs. The most striking difference between the French and English Schools was the use of the splat in chairs. The English had taken this fashion from the Dutch, as we have said, and never abandoned it; and Chippendale and his school took advantage of the additional wood surface thus provided to develop many original themes.

The almost unfailing mark of a Chippendale chair is the bowshaped back; but as in all other cases of unfailing rules, there are exceptions, and it is never safe to classify except by the triple method of form, decoration, and material.

Fig. 3 illustrates a mahogany side chair in typical Chippendale style, showing a well-defined splat with Gothic feeling. The top rail is carved in acanthus leaf design, and the legs and lower edge of the splat are carved in scrolls, very characteristic of Chippendale.

Fig. 4 represents a very beautiful example of a Chippendale Gothic design dating 1760-1770; every detail is well worked out, including the frets on the stiles and legs.

Fig. 5 shows a side chair in what is known as the ribbon-back design, upon



FIG. 6. ARM CHAIR  
STYLE OF SHERATON, EMPIRE  
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1800

which Chippendale especially prided himself. The carving is of a high order in the French rococo fashion and the splat is composed of a bowknot with streamers intertwining and extending the entire length. The legs, which are cabriole, terminate in French scroll feet.

Fig. 6 shows a mahogany arm chair in late Sheraton style, which is commonly



FIG. 8. COMMODORE  
STYLE OF CHIPPENDALE  
ENGLISH

BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

known as the Empire, dating about 1800. The chair is a perfect specimen of the style, with details fully worked out. The supports for the arms are swans raised on cornucopias, below which is carved the classic honeysuckle pattern. The legs are cabriole in the Egyptian fashion, ending in griffin's feet.

In fig. 7 is illustrated a mahogany corner

cupboard in Chippendale style of about 1760-1770.

Fig. 8 shows a mahogany commode in Chippendale style, which copies very closely the French pieces of the same period. One of the most interesting features of this piece are the handles or wooden knobs carved in the French rococo style with cartouches surrounding them.

LUKE VINCENT LOCKWOOD.



FIG. 7. CORNER CUPBOARD  
ENGLISH, ABOUT 1760-1770